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European Allies Apparently Unnerved By White House's Threats to Gadhafi

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WASHINGTON—Although it isn't clear whether the Reagan administration's threats have stopped any new Libyan terrorist plots, Washington's warnings to Moammar Gadhafi apparently have unnerved some U.S. allies.

U.S. diplomats sought to reassure nervous Europeans this week that President Reagan hasn't ordered a new military attack on Libya. American officials also assured Britain, Italy, and other nations that the president is dispatching United Nations Ambassador Vernon Walters to Europe this weekend to seek tougher economic and political sanctions against Libya—not to inform the allies that the U.S. has decided to launch a new air raid.

U.S. and European officials said recent news reports of renewed tensions between the U.S. and Libya—combined with uncertainties about the nature of Mr. Walters's mission—prompted a number of European diplomats to seek assurances that a new U.S. attack isn't imminent. But while seeking to ease those fears, the U.S. also called for new pressure on Libya, and refused to rule out the military option.

State Department officials said the Europeans have been told there is extensive evidence of new Libyan terrorist plots against Americans, in addition to intelligence data suggesting the Libyans may have helped organize recent terrorist activities in Cyprus, West Berlin, and the West African nation of Togo. "If anything, we have been very careful not to rush to judgment on Berlin, Cyprus and Togo," one U.S. official said. "And there are numerous, specific plots against Americans elsewhere which we have not revealed."

At the same time, said one U.S. diplomat, the Europeans have been told that the U.S. won't hesitate to attack Libya again if Col. Gadhafi doesn't stop plotting, or if Libyan-backed terrorists strike an American target. The U.S. launched an air strike against Libya on April 14.

In an effort to dispel European fears, some State Department officials suggested Tuesday that the administration's tough talk was merely part of a National Security Council plan for psychological warfare against Col. Gadhafi. Yesterday, however, White House spokesman Larry Speakes denied that the saber-rattling was intended to provoke the Libyan leader into irrational acts. "Our goal is to prevent Gadhafi from doing things, not to provoke him into doing

things," Mr. Speakes told reporters in Santa Barbara, Calif., where President Reagan is on vacation.

A senior administration official with the president's party in California went further, calling reports of a U.S. plot to provoke Col. Gadhafi "simply not true." The official called a Wall Street Journal report on new American efforts to preempt more Libyan-sponsored terrorism and to destabilize Col. Gadhafi "unauthorized but highly authoritative," and he added: "There's nothing in (the report) we disbelieve."

In fact, the administration's anti-Gadhafi strategy—prepared earlier this year by Donald Fortier, the late deputy national security adviser—calls for efforts to exploit what the U.S. intelligence community considers Col. Gadhafi's psychological weaknesses. Specifically, the U.S. plan calls for constant military, economic, political, and psychological pressure on the mercurial Libyan leader, his inner circle, and the Libyan military.

Earlier this month, when the Central Intelligence Agency and other Western intelligence agencies began reporting that Col. Gadhafi's internal political situation was deteriorating and that the Libyan leader appeared to have revived his terrorist activities, the U.S. decided to try to renew pressure on Libya.

Senior U.S. officials say the key element of the new effort to pressure Col. Gadhafi is Mr. Walters's coming trip to Europe, which was approved by the president last week. The ambassador's top priority, the officials said, will be to persuade the Europeans, especially the Italians and West Germans, to stop buying Libyan oil.

"The idea is to exert more economic pressure on Libya," explained one official. "Every day Gadhafi ignores the economic pressure, the dissent in Libya continues to grow. And because Libya is a one-industry country, the name of the game is oil, oil, and more oil."

Mr. Walters will seek other forms of pressure against the Libyans as well, U.S. officials said. Officials have suggested, for instance, that he will ask the Europeans to cooperate in prohibiting at least some European-based subsidiaries of U.S. companies from doing business with Libya. Washington already has prohibited U.S. companies from direct business dealings with that country.

But U.S. officials said Mr. Walters also

will tell the Europeans that if they won't join in using economic muscle against Libya or if Col. Gadhafi ignores the pressure, Washington will have no choice but to resort to military force again. "When we did it (bombed Libya) April 14, it was a last resort," said one official. "We haven't found any new last resorts in four months."

As previously reported, the Pentagon has drawn up a plan for even larger bombing raids against Libya should President Reagan order them. The U.S. could mount such an attack during the coming weeks, when as many as three aircraft carriers are scheduled to be deployed in the Mediterranean. Officials stressed, however, that the president hasn't ordered any attack.

While top U.S. officials insisted that threats of another attack are real, they acknowledged that such threats also are intended to stir up unrest in the already restless Libyan military. "It's true that Gadhafi has survived for 17 years and it's true that there is no obvious group or leader to pull off a coup against him," said one U.S. official. "There are no Corazon Aquinos in Libya. But Col. Gadhafi came to power as a junior officer, and maybe history will repeat itself with a better ending."